

A MAGNIFICENT MARRIAGE.

BY LUCY H. HOOPER.

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PART II.—CHAPTER III.

EIGHTEEN.



EIGHTEEN years old to-morrow," ejaculated Mrs. Deane, as she surveyed with delight the graceful figure of her only daughter—arrayed in the dress that had just been sent home by Worth,

and which was to be worn at the birthday-party of the following evening. The tall slender form of the young girl showed to fullest advantage in the folds of silver-embroidered tulle that fell around her like a snow-vapor. "Only I do not see why débutantes must wear white always. One gets tired of white. I should have liked something in sulphur-yellow for you, Alice, or in the new rose-red. But Worth said no—your coming-out dress must be white; and I suppose he knows best."

"I suppose he does," said Mr. Deane, coming into the room just at this juncture; "and, at all events, Alice looks uncommonly well in her new gown. And here's a string of beads to wear with it, to-morrow evening; papa's birthday-present, my girl." And he clasped around her throat a necklace formed of a single row of pearls, each the size of a large pea. "Now, how are you going to thank me?"

"This way!" cried Alice, throwing her arms around her father's neck and bestowing upon him a shower of kisses. "How beautiful the pearls are! And how good you are, to remember my birthday so splendidly!"

"And here," continued Mr. Deane, drawing from its case a vast fan of white ostrich-plumes, mounted on blonde tortoise-shell and with the interlaced monogram "A.D." set in diamonds on one of the outside sticks, "is a little affair, just to finish off your get-up. Give me another kiss. And now

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take off your finery and get ready for dinner. Put on one of your prettiest frocks. I am going to bring home with me the son of one of my old Maizetown friends, to dine with us. You have heard me speak of Nelson Forsyth, haven't you, Lizzie? No? Well, no matter. This is his youngest son—John Forsyth—a fine young fellow, the image of his father. I've asked him to come to our party, to-morrow night. He leaves on Thursday morning, for Russia, on business for the firm—Forsyth & Steadman, iron-men, you know." And off went Mr. Deane, with a parting glance at Alice, who was toying with her new and gorgeous fan, but who did not fail to return her father's farewell look with a beaming smile.

Mrs. Deane made no objection, whether audibly or otherwise, to the unexpected guest who was to make his appearance at dinner—that was Mr. Deane's way. In the fast accumulating years of her married life, she had grown used to these sudden introductions. Sometimes the new-comer would be a famous American actor, or a pioneer scout from the Far West, or a newly-elected State Senator, or merely one of the friends of Mr. Deane's younger days; but scarcely a week passed without some one or other of his American comrades making his unexpected appearance at the dinner-table. Mrs. Deane was too wise to address even the slightest remonstrance to her husband on the subject. She had tried it when they had first settled down in their sumptuous Parisian home, but the first objections that she raised had been the last. Mr. Deane gave his wife to understand, in brief but emphatic terms, that it was his will and pleasure to invite to his house whomsoever he pleased, and he was not going to allow any interference with his privilege in that respect, as the master of the household. And Mrs. Deane, with her usual tact and keen common-sense, retreated gracefully from the position she had assumed, and the subject was dropped, never to be resumed. Only,

as Alice returned to the room, in her newly-donned, fresh, and pretty dress of silver-gray foulard, with a pink rose at her throat, she thought, with a shiver: "Now, what if this young man that is coming to-night should fall in love with Alice—and what if Alice should take a fancy to him?" But she stifled the thought as it arose, and smiled pleasantly on her daughter, who came to nestle at her side on the low satin-covered sofa that just held comfortably the two occupants.

"It is very nice to be at home for good, mother," said the young girl.

"Tired of school and of lessons, Alice?"

"Not exactly; but there are so many books that I want to read, and so many pictures that I want to see, and so much music that I should like to hear, and at school one never has time for anything but lessons."

Mrs. Deane passed her hand caressingly over the rippled gold of Alice's shining hair. The dream of her life rose up before her, as she noted the "budding charms of her daughter."

"And what about getting married, Alice? Have you never thought of that, now that your education is finished and you are about to make your entrance into society?"

"Yes, I have thought of it sometimes. But I shall never marry after the European style, mother. I shall love the man who is to be my husband, or I shall never become the wife of any man."

"Alice!" Mrs. Deane restrained with difficulty a sharp gesture of impatience. "Where did you learn those very emancipated ideas? I thought you had been taught better at Madame Ouvray's, and had come to comprehend that a girl's parents are the best judges of the person that she ought to select."

"You forget, mother, that I met at Madame Ouvray's a good many American girls—real Americans, not merely born in the United States and reared and educated in Europe, but genuine ones. And they told me a great deal about a girl's freedom of choice in marriage at home—how the gentleman must really woo and win the woman he desires to marry. Mother, it sickens me to hear of our young heiresses—and I shall be an heiress too, I have been told—handed over like a bale of goods to the man that tenders a title in exchange for her wealth. She is not even disposed of like a horse, for

that is trotted out, and made to show off its paces and prove its good condition, before the bidder will take it. Our girls are just accepted anyhow—so much money down, and the wife thrown in to fill up the bargain."

Mrs. Deane could not trust herself to speak. She rose from her seat and walked restlessly about the room. Alice continued without noticing her perturbation:

"However, we need not discuss the subject any more just now, need we, mother? I have only just come home, and I do not mean to think of matrimony for another year at least. Here, let me put one of those red roses in your corsage. That black lace dress requires a little relief. There, that is better. What a shame it is that I have such a handsome mother! Nobody will look at me when we go to parties together, and everybody will be saying: 'Not bad-looking, but nothing to what her mother was at her age.'"

And Alice merrily embraced Mrs. Deane, who returned her daughter's kiss with a smile if also in silence. She was too wise a woman to arm Alice's prejudices against her by forcing prematurely upon her her views concerning matrimony.

Just then, the door was thrown open and the valet announced somebody in an incomprehensible jargon. The new-comer, who was a noble-looking young man, powerfully built, with large laughing blue eyes contrasting with his brown curly hair and heavy dark mustache, remarked as his hostess rose to greet him:

"This is Mrs. Deane, I suppose. I have to introduce myself, I see, in spite of the card I gave your servant. My name is Forsyth—John Forsyth, of the United States. Mr. Deane told me that he had informed you of the invitation to dinner he so kindly extended to me."

"He did, Mr. Forsyth, and I am pleased to see you. French servants always make a mess, somehow, of even the simplest English or American names. Alice, this is Mr. Forsyth, of whom your father spoke to us this morning."

And, as the beautiful girl extended her hand blushing to the new-comer, the young Westerner looked at her with a sudden and unconscious expression of admiration in his glance, that made Mrs. Deane, in commonplace parlance, feel cold all over. However, nothing special happened to justify

her fears. Mr. Deane came in, a few minutes later; dinner was served; and, if Mr. Forsyth looked long and often at the charming daughter of his host, it was his host himself that monopolized the greater part of the conversation—with inquiries about Maizetown, its growth and progress, and the whereabouts of the old acquaintances of his past life there. And, when the repast was ended and the gentlemen had been left to the enjoyment of their cigars and liqueurs, Mrs. Deane was made quite happy by Alice's request to be allowed to retire.

"You know we always went to bed at nine o'clock, at Madame Ouvray's, mother," she meekly suggested. "It is past ten now, and I am so tired. I hope that Mr. Forsyth will not think me rude."

"I will make your excuses, little one," said Mrs. Deane, cheerfully. "You are right to retire early, for you will have a great deal of fatigue to undergo to-morrow evening. Good-night, and sleep well."

And her parting embrace to her daughter was even more tender than usual. What a good girl was Alice, not to have her mind disturbed for a moment by the good looks and pleasant ways of the young man from Maizetown, whose father was in the iron-trade.

The soiree of the following evening was a very brilliant affair. There were not many guests present—only something over a hundred in all. Mrs. Deane was accustomed to inform all her lady-friends that she hated crushes, and never expected to give large parties—the truth being that, having asked everyone that she knew, she would have been a good deal puzzled as to how to increase largely the number of her invitations. That would come all in good time—when Alice married a nobleman. Meantime, everything possible was done, in the way of decorations and refreshments, to make the entertainment as attractive as possible. The flowers for the supper-table were all orchids of surpassing beauty, set in a background of feathery ferns. The hall and the staircase were transformed into bowers of verdure by the dextrous grouping of tall tropical trees intermixed with flowering plants. The conservatory was lit with Oriental lanterns in wrought brass, set with great imitation jewels. Around the central fountain, a bank in moss had been arranged,

the basin being bordered with a row of tulips in colored glass sunk in the moss, and each containing a light, the effect of the varied hues thus illuminated being particularly striking. In fact, the skilled decorator who had charge of this part of the entertainment quite piqued himself on the glow-worm beauty of the gleaming glass flowers that edged the great basin. Mrs. Deane, in a wonderful brocade in pale-gray and gold—the Queen of Italy had had a dress made of that very material just a week before—received her guests with much dignity. And Alice, in her Titania-robe of white and silver, her great blue eyes dilated with wonderment and delight at the novel scene, was as fair a vision of girlish loveliness as ever gladdened the heart of a fond parent.

Just before supper was announced, an incident took place which came near bringing the brilliant entertainment to a sudden and tragedy-shadowed end. Alice had been taken out for a waltz by a young viscount, famed as being one of the best dancers in Paris, and, in the whirl of the dance, he prolonged its circuit by waltzing his partner around the conservatory. As he swung her, with firm and practiced clasp and swift step, around the central basin, her floating filmy dress swept over the lamps set amid the moss and instantly caught fire. In a moment, the whole gauzy skirt was in a blaze. Alice, wild with terror, broke from her partner and was about to rush blindly and aimlessly away—the worst possible thing she could have done, as the rapid motion would only have fanned and increased the flame. But a strong grasp closed upon her wrist, and a peremptory voice, that of John Forsyth, cried:

"Throw yourself on the floor! Quick, Miss Deane—quick! quick!"

Instinctively she obeyed, the tone of command quelling her terror. Instantly Mr. Forsyth threw his own coat over the burning dress, pressing it down till he had put out the fire, and a few dashes of water from the fountain served to extinguish the last lingering spark.

All this transpired in far less time than it has taken me to narrate the incident. Alice arose from the floor, all dazed and quivering from the shock to her nerves, and with her pretty dress entirely ruined, but with no more serious injury than a rather extensive burn

on one of her arms. As to Mr. Forsyth, he had burnt his hands severely in saving the daughter of his father's old friend from a terrible death, and his dress-coat was a wreck. But it had so chanced that the guests had chiefly directed their steps to the supper-room just at that moment, so that there were scarcely any witnesses to the scene. Mr. Deane, who had been summoned by one of the waiters, undertook to pilot Alice and her preserver through a back staircase leading from the conservatory to his private suite of rooms. There the physician, who had been at once sent for, came to dress the injuries, both of Alice and her preserver, and greatly gladdened the heart of Mr. Deane by pronouncing them to be only skin-deep, and, though painful, not calculated to leave any lasting effects behind them.

"You've saved my child's life," said Mr. Deane, to his young friend, as, pale and well wrapped up and with bandaged hands, the latter was about to take his departure. "And you saved it at great peril and much pain to yourself. Now look here. I'm not a man of many words. But, if ever there's anything in a business way that Josiah Deane can do to help you—and I know you are just starting out in life for yourself—let me know: that's all. I'd like to give you a good old-fashioned hand-shake, but I mustn't hurt you—your poor hands will not be fit for a hearty American grip, this month or more. But you know I mean it, and here comes Alice to tell you herself what she thinks of you and your conduct."

Pale as a ghost, with her bright hair hanging loose, and with her ruined ball-dress exchanged for a tea-gown of pale-blue plush and white lace, her arm enveloped in folds of linen and reposing in a sling, but looking lovelier than ever, Alice glided into the room.

"I could not let you go without coming to thank you," she murmured, timidly approaching John Forsyth. "Are you in much pain? I am so sorry that you were hurt in saving me."

"I am in no pain, Miss Deane—that is to say, none in comparison to the gratification that I feel in having been permitted by Providence to do you this service," replied the young man, gazing with unconcealed admiration on the fair face upraised to his own.

"And I cannot even shake hands with you

to wish you good-bye and a pleasant journey. Father—may I—" And, blushing deeply, she bent her white forehead toward the young man's lips. In response to Mr. Deane's gesture of hearty assent, he touched it with a kiss as reverent as ever was bestowed by a Catholic votary on a holy relic.

"Good-bye, Miss Deane," he said, in a voice shaken by suppressed emotion. "I shall thank heaven all my days for having been able to serve you in that hour of danger. And remember—in the years to come, if ever trial or trouble or peril shall assail you, you have only to summon to your aid the son of your father's old friend, and he will come to you, even though he be separated from you by one-half the globe."

CHAPTER IV.

HER SECOND SEASON.

"ALICE's second season will begin in a few weeks, and she is not married yet or even engaged," mused Mrs. Deane, as she stood at the window of her gorgeous Parisian home, watching with unseeing eyes the dull-gold of a November sunset as it faded behind the Arc de Triomphe. "What a dreadful thing it is, to have a daughter whose head is filled with American ideas respecting matrimony! Alice might have married well a dozen times since her coming-out party, if she had not been possessed with that conviction that she ought to fall in love with her future husband. There was the Count de Viville, whose brother married Kitty Myers five years ago; but, to be sure, he was half an idiot. The Duke de Divonne was old, it is true—but then, such a superb ancient title! I think that Lord Paulton might have had a chance, if he had not come to dine with us, one evening, in a gray shooting-suit and a shirt striped with pink. As to the Baron von Klingenswerth, he spoiled everything by telling Alice that she ought to have learned the best way of killing chickens for her own table—there was nothing like the hand of the house-mistress herself in such matters. However, she has not manifested a preference for any poor man or one in trade—that is some comfort. With her opportunities, she might aspire to anything short of royalty. But how am I ever to induce her to become interested in anyone?" And Mrs. Deane sighed, considering the lot of a matron, bent upon social

advancement and having an only daughter who entertained republican and subversive ideas on things matrimonial, as altogether pitiable.

At this point in her musings, the door of her boudoir was thrown open, and the valet announced a visitor—the Baroness de Menars.

"Bring lights, Jacques. My dear baroness, how glad I am to see you!" And Mrs. Deane, who had been feeling rather bored as well as dismal, greeted the new-comer with much enthusiasm.

The baroness, who was old and very stout, wore a dress of pale-blue *sicilienne*, with boots to match, and a little pink bonnet, that sat very much askew on her tousled gray hair and niddle-noddled over her left eye in a decidedly eccentric manner.

"Where is Alice? Gone out with her father to an afternoon concert? All the better, perhaps, for what I want to say to you. My dear Mrs. Deane, is my bonnet on straight? No? But never mind—these little tulle things always work themselves crooked, sooner or later. Well, what was I saying? Oh, I remember now. I have just come from the Marquise de Sainte Alix's afternoon reception. You don't know the marquise, I believe? Such a sweet person—a good deal talked about, it is true; but then, if you listen to all the gossip afloat about people, you never will have any acquaintances at all. Her reception was very crowded, this afternoon, and, just as I was going away, I was introduced to a gentleman who is, they say, on the lookout for a wife; and I said to myself at once, Alice Deane is just the girl that would suit him. So I got my old friend—the Countess d'Ivora, who knows him very well—to tell me his whole history, and I got so interested and enthusiastic over it that I came at once to talk the affair over with you."

"And who is the gentleman in question?" asked Mrs. Deane, with a certain lack of interest. She had grown used to the raptures of the baroness concerning her marriageable male friends, and had, up to that moment, discovered that the greater part of those raptures possessed no foundation in solid fact.

"The Prince de Valdora, my dear—an Italian title, but an old French family. The Valdoras came to France in the train

of Marie de Medicis when she arrived from Italy to marry Henri IV." (The baroness had discovered by this time that, in talking about past times and historic personages to Mrs. Deane, it was as well to go amply into details.) "The head of the house married a French lady, and bought a great estate somewhere in the provinces, and it has been held by his descendants ever since. The prince is the last of his race; all his brothers and sisters died in infancy."

"And the prince himself?"

"A most elegant man, my dear—a true hero of romance—tall, with such a stately grace of bearing and such perfect manners! Not young—I should say forty at the very least—but so high-bred, and so accomplished, and with such an interesting story connected with his past."

"Story? Has he ever been married?"

"Never—but I'll tell you all about it. It seems that the prince had a friend—not an ordinary acquaintance, but a dear and intimate friend that he loved as though he were his brother. Some ten years ago, this gentleman, the Count d'Anglade, went, as he did every year, to spend some months at the Chateau de Valdora, and to enjoy hunting and fishing with the prince. He started out to take a walk, one hot evening during his visit, in the forest; a terrible thunderstorm came up, and he lost his way, it was supposed. But, at all events, he fell in with a tramp who had been prowling about the neighborhood for some time, and the wretch murdered and robbed him. The assassin was caught, and tried, and convicted, and guillotined. But the prince has never recovered from the shock of his friend's tragic death, so near his own doors and not twentyfour hours after he had saved the unfortunate gentleman's life at a boar-hunt. He has lived a very dreary secluded life down at his chateau ever since. But some of his friends have persuaded him that it would be a good thing for him to marry some young, bright, sensible girl—just such a one as your Alice—who would bring him a good dowry and enable him to reconstruct the chateau—which is in a rather dilapidated condition, it must be confessed—and who would, moreover, act as a consoler to him—help to bring up his moral tone, etc."

"If only Alice can be persuaded to take a fancy to him," responded Mrs. Deane, with

a dubious shake of her head. "She is so self-willed and opinionated, and unfortunately her father always backs her up in all her ideas, and declares that she shall never marry anyone that she cannot love. I really do believe that he would be best pleased if she were to marry an American. Only fancy!" And Mrs. Deane looked quite shocked at the horror of her own surmise.

"Well, we must try to avert anything so dreadful," said the baroness, whose grandfather had been a plumber and glazier, and who had been a Miss Brown, of Doylestown, Pennsylvania. "So I have planned a little dinner-party for Thursday evening, if you have no engagement; just you, and Mr. Deane, and Alice, and the Countess d'Ivory, and the prince, and one or two gentlemen of no importance to fill up. No engagement? That's well. Now, my dear, not a word to Alice about the prince. I want him to burst upon her, so to speak—to impress her as a sort of romantic hero. Don't forget—Thursday, at half-past seven precisely." And away went the baroness, with a full conviction that she was in a good way to earn a handsome commission on the dowry of the future princess—five per cent. possibly, and not improbably ten—to say nothing of a handsome present from Mrs. Deane, should the negotiations come to a favorable conclusion.

Alice could hardly comprehend why it was that her mother was so anxious respecting her toilette and her appearance in general for the little dinner at the Baroness's. However, she gently but firmly overruled her mother's desire that she should get herself up in a costume of extraordinary and ungirlish magnificence on the occasion, the slumbering tastes of Mrs. Deane for gorgeous apparel being apt to wake up and become clamorous from time to time. However, the anxious mother was forced to confess that Worth had done the right thing, when her daughter appeared before her in a cloud of pale-green tulle, through whose misty folds appeared, here and there, bouquets of lilies of the valley and long grasses, and with her birthday pearls as her sole ornament. The delicate green of the dress set off to advantage the white skin and brilliant bloom, the sparkling blue eyes and golden-lighted hair of the young girl, while the artistic lines of the corsage showed off a figure unmatched for symmetry between the four seas.

"I never saw you look prettier in all my life, daughter," said Mr. Deane, surveying her admiringly, when she came to show herself to him before putting on her long ball-cloak of white *sicilienne* lined with pale-pink plush. And even Mrs. Deane smiled approval as she gazed.

Alice had made up her mind to pass a very stupid evening: for dinner-parties in Paris are but dreary affairs usually for young girls, the strict laws of French etiquette forbidding a gentleman who takes in to dinner an unmarried damsel from talking to her very much—or, indeed, from addressing her in anything but the merest platitudes. Her cavalier on this occasion was a Spanish marquis—the baroness never invited people that had no titles to her entertainments—and he was fat and old and stupid, spoke very little French and no English, and occupied himself entirely with his dinner. She found herself, however, seated next to the Prince de Valdora, who had the post of honor on the right hand of the hostess. She was much struck with the stately elegance and high-bred manners of her new acquaintance; and the story of the tragic incident which had darkened his life—and which had been whispered to her before dinner by her hostess—caused her to look upon him with an unusual degree of interest. In defiance of the rules of etiquette, he talked to her through the greater part of the dinner, the baroness being apparently absorbed in a flirtation with a very flighty little viscount who sat on her left. And he talked well, and told her so many interesting anecdotes concerning the painters and authors of the day, and about the new singers at the Grand Opera, and the projected alliances in the families of the Orleans princes, and all in a tone of such deference and courtesy, that Alice was altogether charmed and absorbed, and was really surprised when the baroness gave the signal for the return of the ladies to the drawing-room. The prince did not linger long in the smoking-room, but joined the ladies after he had finished a single cigarette. He hovered around Alice, taking care that she had a cup of coffee as soon as that beverage was served and holding her fan while she drank it; and he contrived, before they parted, to let fall just a few words which left on the young girl's

mind an impression that she had beguiled his thoughts from dwelling on the sorrows of the past as no one had ever been able to do before. And, as she sank to sleep, there rose before her a vision of a noble melancholy countenance with aquiline features and large dark-gray eyes; and a low-toned murmur, grave and tinged with mournful pathos, filled her dreams with a strange sad music.

Before a week had passed, the Prince de Valdora had taken up the position of the avowed wooer of Alice Deane. Not that the courtship, as conducted according to the laws of European etiquette in such matters, resembled in any way the frank open love-making of an American suitor and the sunny acquiescence of the girl who rejoices in the attentions of the young man she is fast learning to love. Of course, the prince and Alice were never permitted a moment's tête-à-tête—that would have been a proceeding too glaringly improper to be thought of for a moment. There were no moonlight walks together, nor stolen conversations in quiet corners, nor furtive hand-clasps exchanged when no one was looking, nor any other of the delicious bits of foolishness that mark this period in the life of an American youth and maiden, and that are so very nonsensical and withal so very delightful. The prince dropped in to Mrs. Deane's box at the Grand Opera, and always had a few very particular words to address to Alice; and he danced with her at the balls at which they sometimes met; and he sent her flowers occasionally, and now and then tickets for some picture exhibition or concert to which admission was only to be gained by special favor. Also he became a constant guest at Mrs. Deane's Tuesday-afternoon receptions, and always contrived to linger beside the tea-table over which Alice was wont to preside, drinking more of the fine California tea that formed the staple beverage of those reunions than was altogether good for him, and managing to take a very long time in the preparation and consumption of each cup. He also figured prominently at one or two of the dinner-parties which Mrs. Deane found it convenient to give just then. And so Dame Rumor had begun to connect the names of Miss Deane and the Prince de Valdora before the gentleman's friend and distant relative, the

Countess d'Ivoire, called, according to custom, on Mr. Deane, to ask if the proposals of the prince for the hand of his daughter would meet with favorable consideration. For no well-bred gentleman in France ever hazards an offer of marriage, even to the parents of the young lady, till he is sure that in so doing he runs no risk of a rejection.

It cost Mr. Deane a sore struggle before he could make up his mind to consent to the union of his only child to a foreigner, even though he was so unexceptionable a parti as the Prince de Valdora. He knew perfectly well that almost invariably the girl that marries a European of high rank is, by her marriage, lost to her family and to the friends of her girlhood. The relatives of her husband take care that, thereafter, she shall be altogether absorbed in the duties and the details of her new life. They detach her in every possible way from the ties and the usages of her native land, and the trans-Atlantic bride becomes transformed in a very few years to a being that even the most intimate friends of her girlhood would scarcely recognize. Language, religion, social habits, are all those of her adopted country and her new surroundings. The wonderful adaptability of the American feminine nature is shown in the rapidity of the change. The European princess or marchioness or countess is generally, according to the old French proverb, "more royalist than the king, and more Catholic than the Pope." So, in view of this total separation from the daughter that had been the idol of his later years, Mr. Deane hesitated long before giving his consent to the marriage. But all his wife's influence was brought to bear to win his reluctant assent. Even that would have been powerless, had he not noted the fact that Alice's affections were for the first time engaged. Not that she was madly in love with her grave elderly suitor. But the grace of his bearing, the charm of his conversation, and, above all, the melancholy that overshadowed his existence, had exercised for the high-minded girl a subtle fascination. She longed to brighten the life that had been so densely and so undeservedly clouded. "You shall be my consoler," he had murmured, raising her hand to his lips as he spoke. And the idea of bringing back the brightness, and chasing away the gloom from that saddened existence, had proved, to

the gentle sensitive heart of the young girl, a surer passport than her lover's princely title and fascinating manners.

It was a magnificent wedding. The ball, given on the evening of the signing of the marriage-contract, was one of the most brilliant entertainments of an unusually gay season. Mr. Deane's settlements on his daughter and her possible offspring were superb, though, in case of her death without leaving children her wealth, was to revert to the Deane family, all except an income of handsome proportions, which her husband was to enjoy as long as he should live. The prince had argued strongly in favor of a fixed sum being placed in his hands, instead of the proposed income; but, on finding Mr. Deane inflexible on this point, he had withdrawn the demand with his usual good grace. All his noble relatives and friends were present at the ball. The Duke de Nemours and an Austrian archduke were the bridegroom's witnesses to the marriage-contract. Those of the bride were the American Minister and John Forsyth, the latter having returned for a space from his Russian expedition, and having been warmly welcomed by Mr. and Mrs. Deane, as well as by Alice herself. He was present at the church wedding with its crowd of distinguished guests and with a Cardinal to perform the ceremony, and also at the reception which followed, where Alice, in her vaporous toilette of point lace, heard herself hailed for the first time as the Princess de Valdora, and where Mrs. Deane, beaming with delight on the fashionable throng that filled her drawing-rooms, felt that at last the object of her life was accomplished.

As Alice left the room to go change her wedding-dress for her traveling-costume, she paused for a moment to speak to John Forsyth, who was standing near the door. Pointing to a faint crimson scar on her arm, the sole trace remaining of the catastrophe that had threatened her life on the night of her

coming-out ball, she said softly: "I shall never forget, Mr. Forsyth, the deep debt of gratitude that I owe you. I do not even need the reminder of this little scar."

"Then, when you look at it, princess," said the young man, "let it recall to you the fact that somewhere in this world—in Russia, in France, or in America—you have a friend that is ready to lay down his life to do you a service, and on whom you have but to call, if such service be ever needed."

"Very kind of him, to be sure," remarked Mrs. Deane, who had accompanied her daughter. "But your destiny, Alice, is too brilliant a one, and your married life is opening too brightly before you, for his offered services ever to be needed. What on earth could Mr. John Forsyth do for the Princess de Valdora?"

"The Princess de Valdora—and not my Alice any more," said Mr. Deane, as he clasped his daughter in his arms.

"Always your Alice, father—always—always," sobbed the fair bride, as she tenderly returned her father's kiss. But the old man only shook his head.

"No, dear. Had you chosen a good American husband, as I hoped you would do—but there, there: I did not mean to make you cry. Tell your husband he must make you happy, or else— Just think of my having a son-in-law who cannot understand a word that I say to him, and who cannot speak a word of his wife's native language." And, with this effort at jocularly, Mr. Deane said good-bye to his daughter and his son-in-law. But, when they had taken their departure, he did not go back to the drawing-room to bid the guests at the reception farewell. He sought refuge, instead, in his own dressing-room, locked the door to keep out all intruders, and then, burying his face in his hands, the sturdy old man wept bitterly—such tears as, he said to himself, he had not shed "since Sarah died."

[END OF PART SECOND.]

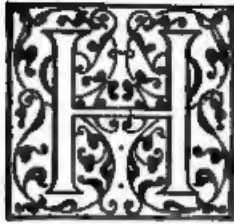
DEATH.

O DEATH the Consecrator!
Nothing so sanctifies a name
As to be written—dead;

Nothing so wins a life from blame,
So covers it from wrath and shame,
As does the burial-bed.

IN SPITE OF ALL.

BY FRANK LEE BENEDICT.



HAVING reached Washington late on the previous night and gone out of my room quite early in the morning, I had had no opportunity to observe the slight variations in

the apparent sameness of the countless corridors.

This is the only excuse I can offer for my horrible blunder—not that at the time it seemed an excuse either to myself or the lady on whom I had so unceremoniously intruded.

It was considerably after noon when I returned to the hotel. I was in a great hurry, as I had several letters to write before going out again to keep a business appointment. I got my key from the office; there was some delay at the elevator, and, as I found on inquiry that my rooms were only on the third floor, I hurried up the stairs instead of waiting to make the ascent in an easier manner.

The second corridor to the left I elected to believe the one I had passed along in the morning; I remembered that the door of my sitting-room was the fourth on the right hand after quitting the main hall. I looked up without putting my glass to my short-sighted eyes and read the numerals 271, those of my temporary castle.

The key did not enter the lock easily, and, to get a better purchase, I took hold of the knob; it turned in my grip, and the door yielded. I had time to think that the chamber-maid must be arranging my apartment, and to reflect also that she deserved a reprimand for being there so late in the day—then I opened the door and closed it noiselessly behind me.

The room was a large one; I glanced toward the further end, and, to my unutterable amazement and confusion, saw a lady seated at a large writing-desk which was littered with papers. She held an unfolded letter in one hand; her head rested on the other, and she was looking upward with an expression of terrible anxiety in her beautiful eyes.

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I saw all these details as by a lightning-flash, then, before I could step back, I dropped my stick, which struck the carpet with a dull heavy thud.

The lady turned her gaze in my direction. She did not cry out, as most women would have done; did not even stir; she looked full at me.

"What are you doing there?" she asked, in a clear vibrating voice which gave me a sensation of positive guilt. "What are you doing there?" she repeated, before I could open my lips.

"I—I beg a thousand pardons!" I began, stammeringly. "I thought this was my room—I have made a stupid mistake."

"A very singular mistake," she amended, as I paused to catch my breath, which was coming as fast as if I had just run up a steep hill.

"Indeed I'm not a burglar or thief," I said, so stung by the contemptuous suspicion in her voice that, for the sake of my own self-respect, I tried to smile and pull myself together. "If you want proof, I will ring and send for the book-keeper."

"There is no necessity," she rejoined, waving her hand toward the door.

I could not let well enough alone and go, but must needs attempt to disabuse her mind of the impression she apparently entertained of my belonging to the band of "hotel sneaks"—a mistake which under other circumstances might have been rather amusing to a lawyer who at five-and-thirty was ranked among the prominent members of his profession.

"At least let me try to excuse my blunder," I hurried on; "to—to explain, I mean!" I had got hopelessly confused again, aware that I was making a donkey of myself and yet unable to stop or to find the card-case for which I was wildly hunting, first in one pocket, then in another. "You may possibly know my name—that will prove to you I could not intentionally have—" An impatient movement on her part cut me short, and I blurted out: "It is Herbert Clevis."

She rose as suddenly as if moved by a spring and gave me one glance; I never saw a human face express such withering disdain. Then she closed the lid of the desk, locked it, put the key in her pocket, and moved as swift and still as a shadow close to the bell-pull, while I stood watching her in stupefied bewilderment.

"Your blunder is not difficult to understand," she said. "But remember this: I am always on my guard—always."

Once more she waved her hand toward the door; this time, it was no mere gesture of dismissal—it was a horrible insult, worse than her inexplicable words—it was the way one might order a dog accustomed to obey at a sign.

"She is mad," was my rapid thought, as rapidly dissipated. No—that face bore no trace of mental aberration.

"Must I ring?" the clear voice questioned, and I realized that I was so thunderstricken I had not attempted to move.

"Great heavens!" I exclaimed. "I—I beg your pardon; I never was so ashamed in my life. But—but I can't understand what your words imply. You never saw me before—that my name should—"

"Not be pleasant hearing and its owner a welcome visitor, to Mrs. Fielding, surprises you, does it?"

"Mrs. Fielding?" I echoed, more dazed and horrified than before.

"No doubt it surprises you also to hear my name," she went on, with increasing scorn in her voice. "You did not know it—you mistook this room for yours—and you expect me to believe that! But let me assure you of one thing: I have learned to watch—to take good care; my valuable papers are never in my desk."

"Oh, madam! madam!" I fairly groaned.

"Will you force me to ring?" she asked, the fire of a sudden wrath obliterating the composed contempt in her face and eyes and fairly scorching my soul with its repressed passion.

"I am gone!" I exclaimed. "But do believe me—I did not intentionally intrude."

Again that gesture—a blow would have been easier to bear.

I was out in the hall; I had shut the door. I was looking closely at the number—211: my room was in the corridor beyond.

I kept my appointment; but I think the

man who tried to explain the business-matter on which he wanted advice must have fancied I was intoxicated or had been seized with softening of the brain. The recollection of my horrible blunder haunted me like a nightmare all day, and remained a tormenting humiliation for a good while afterward.

Mrs. Fielding was the widow of a man connected with my family, and a lawsuit was at this very time imminent between her and her late husband's half-brother and sisters. I knew the story—that is, the relations' side of it. Though the lady was quite young, they had no doubt of her being a thorough adventuress, who had inveigled Edgar Fielding into marrying her, and persuaded him, when enfeebled in mind and body by a sudden and fatal illness, to make a will leaving her his entire fortune.

There was more involved, however, than his own estate. Mr. Fielding had held in his hands property which belonged to his half-brother and sisters. He had been their guardian, and, as the youngest girl had only come of age a few weeks before his death, no settlement of matters had been made. The property left the heirs was, at the time of their mother's decease, worth thirty thousand dollars; but it was said to have increased in value, during the past ten years, to somewhere about two hundred thousand. The indignation of the family can therefore easily be conceived when they learned that their claim was set down at the original amount. Sundry sharp letters were exchanged between my cousin Howard Clevis and the widow's legal advisers; and, to add insult to injury, these gentlemen finally wrote that it had been and still remained their client's intention to increase the thirty to seventy thousand, implying that the surplus was an act of sheer generosity on her part.

This offer was flatly refused, and warning given that, unless different terms were proposed, a lawsuit would be instituted. The lawyers behaved oddly; they seemed trying to temporize, to discover how cheaply their client could escape. Between their apparent attempts at subterfuge and various other circumstances, a good deal of time was consumed before it became clear that the suit would really be necessary. Even after this decision was reached, so many unavoidable delays had arisen that, although Edgar

Fielding had been dead over a year, the matter had not yet come into court. Things looked so mysterious that it was difficult to decide the exact ground on which the case ought to be based, till at last it seemed possible to prove that Mr. Fielding had lost most of his own money, and that the fortune he left really belonged to the estate for which he had acted as guardian. Other revelations followed, and finally a claim to the whole estate was to be made, as the lawyer for the heirs hoped to show that the marriage was not even legal, though this expectation was kept as secret as possible.

Fielding's marriage had taken place some two years previous. Howard Clevis and several others of the relations had at the time written me very indignant letters concerning the event, which had proved an unpleasant surprise to them all. Some person out in California had sent the family information that odd reports were in circulation regarding the bride, and that she was said to have been mixed up with some very queer people in Sacramento.

Young Clevis had merely vouchsafed a brief cold reply in return for his half-brother's announcement, and the sisters paid no attention whatever thereto, so of course all communication ceased.

I went to Europe, partly on professional business, partly on account of my health, and came home some months after Edgar Fielding's death. When I was told how matters stood, I felt very indignant on my cousins' account, and advised them to push their claim, though I took no personal part in the business beyond writing to an old friend in San Francisco to learn if he knew anything about Fielding's marriage or the condition of his affairs.

This fact might have come to the lady's knowledge and roused her anger, but it seemed no good reason for supposing I had deliberately intruded into her apartment. Of course I chafed horribly under the incomprehensible suspicions which she had expressed and which I must remain powerless to remove.

In one way or another, during the next thirtysix hours, Mrs. Fielding was seldom out of my mind, and the recollection of her look and words burned my memory like fire.

To increase my chagrin, I received a letter from Howard Clevis, written in San Francisco,

where it seemed he had been for several weeks. His lawyer was ready with the case, but a delay had been asked for by the other side, and Mrs. Fielding had suddenly gone East. He was confident of success, and wrote sketchily of the important testimony he expected to produce. It struck me, however, that there was still more vague talk than evidence, where the former Miss Lafont was concerned. But what exasperated me most was this request: "I wish you could manage to see her without her knowing who you are—I'd like to hear what impression she would produce. Then I'd like to find out what sort of mind she is really in. I believe she is in a funk, and, if not pushed on by her lawyers—very keen unscrupulous fellows, who will no doubt bleed her well—would give in."

I threw the letter into the fire in a positive rage, and prepared to go out in far from a friendly state of mind toward my young relative. Meet her, indeed! Great heavens, if I were ever forced to endure another such look and gesture, I should inevitably either become a murderer or commit suicide—indeed, I would rather bear any species of physical torture than even see her again under any circumstances.

This was the state of mind in which I set out to drive to a friend's house, who lived some miles distant from town, and those absurdly exaggerated sentiments were the exact expression of my thoughts. Get the woman out of my head, I could not; her very beauty, the splendor of her eyes, and the grace of figure and movement which had so deeply photographed themselves on my mind were only an additional exasperation! Actually I felt so savage that I would have liked to think she looked capable of all the wickedness my cousin ascribed to her, and I was unable to enjoy even that petty satisfaction, for I had never seen a face which more clearly expressed delicacy and purity in every feature and line.

I was within about half a mile of my destination, when, as we gained the brow of a hill, my driver pointed toward the foot, saying:

"That fellow's got into a bad box down there."

By the aid of my glass, I could see that some accident had happened to a carriage. The coachman and footman had just unhitched the horses, which were still restless from

a recent fright. In a few instants, we reached the bottom of the descent, and, as my vehicle passed the landau, I could plainly see its occupant—it was Mrs. Fielding.

My driver stopped a little beyond and called out to know what was the matter.

"Axle-tree broken," was the laconic response.

"Robert," said that clear voice which I remembered so well, and which gave me a sensation as if someone were pumping cold spring-water down my back, "there must be a house in the neighborhood where you can hire a conveyance to take me into town."

"You can do it," I remarked, in a low tone, to my coachman; "it is only a short walk from here to Fairbanks. If you come back for me by three o'clock, that will be time enough."

In a second, I was out of the carriage. We were close to a sharp curve in the road, down which I turned and was lost to sight before the driver could even call to the footman; for I felt certain that, if Mrs. Fielding were to catch a glimpse of me, she would prefer to sit where she was till midnight, or make her way homeward on foot, in spite of the mud and a threatening shower, rather than accept a civility at my hands.

My man returned for me in ample season. As I got into the carriage, I said:

"Well, you landed the lady safely at her destination?"

"Yes, sir," he replied. "She seemed mightily took aback when I told her your name—"

"I wasn't aware you knew it," I interrupted.

"Oh, yes, sir; I've been in Atley's livery-stables for years—seen you very often when you was on here."

"There was no necessity that I can perceive for mentioning me," I observed, rather crossly.

"Yes sir—there was. When we got to her hotel, she told her footman to pay me; and he explained to her what you'd done, and she asked your name. I s'pose she was afraid she had put you to trouble."

At first, I felt sorry that Mrs. Fielding should have had the annoyance of learning to whom she owed assistance; but remembering what mortification the thought of

her had caused me for two days past, I savagely decided it was only fair she should, in her turn, have a little worry on my account.

That very evening, we met face to face in a corridor of the hotel; but, fortunately, each was in the company of several other persons. The next morning, I found myself her vis-à-vis in a street-car, and got out at the nearest corner; two hours later, I ran against her as she was leaving a shop; and, before I had recovered from these encounters, I stepped into the elevator at the Arlington and perceived her seated there. I was coward enough to retreat, but had at least the consolation of knowing that on this occasion she did not happen to see me.

Toward six o'clock, I went back to the hotel. I had refused two invitations to dine, as I expected to be occupied during the early part of the evening; but, at the last moment, the committee-meeting was put off. It was the English Minister's "at home" night, and, as I meant to put in a brief appearance there later, I decided to dress and go over to the club, of which I had received a month's freedom, where I should be certain to meet acquaintances and so avoid a solitary dinner.

As I entered the vestibule, somebody called my name. There stood my old friend Fred Norris, whom I supposed to be still in Paris—where I had parted from him just before I sailed for America, after having spent several months traveling about the Continent in his company and that of his charming wife. It seemed they had returned only a few weeks previous; business had called Fred to Washington, where they had arrived only the evening before and were established in apartments in H Street. "Nettie saw your name in the paper," Fred explained, "and I promised to hunt you up; but I've not had a minute all day. You must dine with us; 'pot-luck,' you understand; but, as Welker is our caterer, you'll not be starved."

We were soon at the house; the servant said that Mrs. Norris was in the parlor. Fred threw open the door and pushed me in. The gas had not been lighted; but, looking through the dimness, I could see that two ladies were seated near a window.

"Nettie," cried Fred, "I have found and captured him! What a dungeon of a place!"

Mrs. Norris hurried forward, saying:

"How glad, glad I am! This is a day of charming surprises! Oh, Mr. Clevis, I am delighted to meet you again! Look in the window, Fred!"

"Why—why, it isn't possible!" cried Norris.

I could hear his voice and the lady's in rapid dialogue while his wife and I were exchanging hearty greetings. Then the servant was lighting the gas, and Mrs. Norris saying:

"It is my fault the room was so dark; you remember my old fancy for twilight, Mr. Clevis!"

"Pitch darkness, she means!" cried Fred.

"What manners!" laughed his wife. "At least, you might introduce our guests or let me! Adelaide, this is the fellow-traveler I told you about!"

"And this, Herbert, is my wife's ideal school-friend," said Fred. "You must have heard us talk about her times enough—"

The lights in the chandelier blazed up; by their radiance, I saw the black-robed figure, the fair face, and the sad eyes which had so indelibly impressed themselves on my memory; and, while my head swam, I heard our hostess saying:

"Mrs. Fielding, let me present Mr. Clevis. Now remember, both of you, I expect you to like each other from the outset, and not behave as one's friends usually do when one makes them acquainted."

Mrs. Norris had drawn me forward while she spoke; I was bowing to Mrs. Fielding; her eyes were full on mine—I saw a quick flash brighten them.

"I have met—I mean, I am afraid—"

I could not get any further in my attempt at an explanation—I knew that Fred and his wife were looking wonderingly at me. Then, as I stood positively spell-bound under the scrutiny of those merciless eyes, Mrs. Fielding said in her low clear tones:

"Mr. Clevis and I have already met. It was he who helped me out of my unpleasant predicament yesterday, Nettie—I am glad of this opportunity to express my thanks."

"How odd—how delightful—only fancy, Fred!" cried Mrs. Norris, bursting into a rapid recital of the little adventure, while I still stood looking at Mrs. Fielding.

Her eyes said so plainly: "I do not choose to annoy my friends by treating you as you deserve," that I felt my temper rise and had to struggle with myself not to blurt out the whole truth.

Dinner was presently announced. I always remember that meal as one of the oddest experiences of my life. There was a great deal of gay talk; occasionally some subject of importance would come up; and once or twice, when I spoke rather earnestly in answer to playful attacks on what our hostess called my "socialistic manias," I caught a glance of cruel suspicion or passionate defiance from Mrs. Fielding's dark orbs, which effectually checked my enthusiasm.

Why the woman should feel so bitter toward me was incomprehensible—my only sin consisted in being a third cousin of her dead husband's relations. I was in no way connected with the trouble between them and her. I thought, what a horribly vindictive unjust creature she must be; yet on general subjects her views were broad and noble. Sometimes I felt inclined to repay her by giving a smile of unbelief in my turn, but I could not. Mrs. Fielding fascinated me, though I tried to remember that perhaps she was merely acting a part—deceiving that frank honest couple. It came out in the course of conversation that the two ladies had been school-mates for several years in St. Louis. Since then, they had only met about the time Fred and Nettie were married. It seemed that, after the Norrises went to Europe, the friends had not even been frequent correspondents; that, beyond the leading events of Mrs. Fielding's life during those years—her marriage and her widowhood—the Norrises knew very little about her.

So finding her loved and trusted by Nettie Norris was no proof of the falsity of the evidence my cousin's lawyer expected to bring against this lady. Somehow, it hurt me to be forced to admit this, even in thought, and altogether my feelings toward her were the most extraordinary jumble. Indeed, between the charm of her face and manner, and the anger she every now and then roused in me by some quick inimical look or ironical smile, I got as dizzy as if I had drunk a bottle of champagne instead of the solitary glass of claret to which I confined myself.

I felt that I would like to provoke the explanation which I considered my due;

but, of course, no man above the civilization of a Hottentot could have done that under the circumstances. Dinner ended, and we returned to the parlor—the ladies having insisted that we should not smoke our cigars in bachelor banishment.

Mrs. Norris seated herself at the piano and began playing snatches from a new opera, while we all discussed musical matters in the pauses. Suddenly Nettie said:

"Adelaide, you ought to ask Mr. Clevis's advice—you might take a feminine advantage. What is the good of meeting a famous lawyer, if you can't get an opinion out of him gratis?"

"Has she any special need of one?" Fred asked.

"Oh, I forgot you didn't know!" rejoined his wife. "Only fancy, Fred—her husband's abominable relations mean to bring a law-suit—"

Before she could get further, Mrs. Fielding had moved quickly to the piano and laid her hand on Nettie's shoulder. Mrs. Norris looked up inquiringly; but Fred, who had been busy lighting a refractory cigar, had not noticed the movement, and he called:

"Well? Well? Please finish your sentence. Why do you rouse a fellow's curiosity in that fashion, and then stop at the point of interest?"

As he spoke, he turned round and stared in surprise at the tableau. Nettie was regarding her friend in a bewildered fashion; I had instinctively risen and taken a step forward. As I did so, Mrs. Fielding turned, and, still keeping her hand on Nettie's shoulder, looked intently at me with an expression which betrayed regret that the crisis should have arrived then and there, yet all the while there was a light in her eyes which said plainly that she felt no inclination to show me any leniency.

For myself, I was heartily glad the catastrophe had happened, and I determined to take the initiative.

"Mrs. Fielding," I said, "if it was on my account that you checked Mrs. Norris, I beg to—"

"It was not," she interrupted, haughtily; "it was in the hope of saving our friends here some annoyance. But since she would have had to be told—Nettie, Mr. Clevis is connected with my husband's family—"

"But has no part in this suit," I added,

quickly. "My cousin John Clevis married the widowed mother of the late Edgar Fielding. It is the Clevis heirs who are concerned in this matter."

"You ought to have concerned yourself, one would think!" Mrs. Fielding exclaimed, hotly. "I don't know how clear an explanation was given to you, but I do know that it was enough to show where the right lay and what it was your duty to do."

"Indeed, I have not the slightest idea of your meaning," I answered. "I suppose it was natural enough that my sympathy should go with my cousins. I did not know you—I had heard only their side—"

Mrs. Fielding interrupted me by a passionate gesture, and, turning toward Nettie and Fred, who stood looking at us both in distressed bewilderment, hurried on:

"I did my best to settle matters; I offered double the sum due the heirs. It was refused. They could not comprehend that I was actuated by generosity—they thought I was afraid!"

"Oh, madam," I pleaded, "their conduct was not my fault—not of my advising—"

"I will come to that," she interrupted again, not even deigning me a glance. "Mr. Norris, you are an upright man; Nettie, you are a warm-hearted woman: you can understand what I felt when I discovered how my motives were misconstrued."

"But since Mr. Clevis did not know the rights of the case, Adelaide," Mrs. Norris suggested.

"Did not know?" she repeated. "Oh, I am sorry this has happened here; but I must speak now."

"It is much better," Fred added. "If you and Clevis can only come to an understanding, I shall be so glad I brought you together."

"If Mrs. Fielding will say outright why she feels so bitter toward me," I pleaded.

But she went on, heedless of my words:

"The human being does not live who could have borne more, if possessed of an atom of self-respect. There is no insult to which I have not been subjected. Their lawyer is an unscrupulous man, who has a personal hatred toward me. Before I left California, an attempt was even made to carry off some of my private papers."

"Madam! madam!" I exclaimed, "I would stake my life that my relatives had no share in any underhand proceeding."

"I accuse no one—I state facts," she continued. "Since I came here, the whole nefarious scheme has come to my knowledge. It is proposed to try to invalidate my marriage; this plot was to be kept a secret till the suit came on."

"But they can't do it!" cried Nettie.

"No; even the Satanic craft of their lawyer cannot manage that. But it was proposed!" She turned suddenly on me and added: "The day I looked up and saw you standing in my room, I had just received the letter. I was face to face with the most troubled hour of my life; I knew that, to right myself, I must let the dead suffer. And you could have spared him and me—you! If you had granted his request—the prayer of a dying man; but you paid no heed—did not make the letter known—"

The door opened and the servant announced a couple of gentlemen; Fred had mentioned that they were coming, but we had all forgotten the fact. Before they could enter, Mrs. Fielding and Nettie had disappeared into one of the inner rooms.

"For God's sake, find out what it all means!" I whispered, as I wrung Fred's hand. "Evidently she supposes Fielding wrote to me about the matter. I never had a line from him in my life—tell her that!"

"I will," he rejoined. "I'll get rid of these fellows as soon as I can. If possible, you shall hear from me to-night."

The state of mind in which I returned to my rooms baffles all attempt at description. I was so confused that I felt as guilty as if I had been deliberately engaged in some nefarious plot; at the same time, I was angry and hurt beyond measure by the accusations Mrs. Fielding had poured out, though obliged to admit that, if she believed it had been in my power to right matters, she had every reason to loathe and despise me.

I never passed two more dreadful hours than those I spent before Fred Norris arrived; and the tidings he brought, though they threw light on the inexplicable business, were far from satisfactory.

"I do not know what my husband wrote," Mrs. Fielding had said; "but, in looking over papers after his death, I found a sealed letter directed to Herbert Clevis. There was a page of instructions for me; Mr. Fielding

looked forward to the possibility of his relations' trying to make trouble, and, in case they should, I was to send that letter. 'Herbert Clevis will settle everything,' he had written."

"Well? Well?" I asked.

"The will was admitted to probate," Fred continued. "When Mrs. Fielding found that the heirs meant to dispute her claim, she offered the extra money—"

"Very unwise," I interrupted.

"Yes; there's something I don't understand," Fred said. "It looks to me as if she had wanted to screen Fielding, and had been ready to despoil herself in order to do it; but, when she discovered what a plot threatened her, she became furious."

"Naturally. But that letter for me?"

"Ah! She forwarded it only a few weeks ago. She waited, it seems, till assured that your cousins or their lawyer would consent to no compromise. Instead of hearing from you, she received, the other day, tidings of that infernal plot. I don't know about your cousin Howard—but that lawyer of his is a consummate scoundrel."

"Couldn't you make her believe I never got the letter?"

"Oh, yes! Now, what she believes is that Strong the lawyer managed to intercept it. The story sounds like a chapter out of a sensational novel! She was boarding, at the time, at a hotel in San Francisco—she says she can prove that a waiter named Purvis, who did errands for her, was in Strong's pay—"

"For heaven's sake, try to tell the thing clearly!" I broke in. "Now let us get back to the beginning, and go through the affair as systematically as we can."

By the time we had finished talking, my mind was made up.

"I shall go to New York in the morning," I said; "in two days, I can start for San Francisco. You know me well enough to be certain I shall leave no stone unturned to ferret out the truth. At least, you can assure your friend I am an honest man."

"Oh, she does not blame you now," Fred declared. "You see, there's a good deal we don't understand! She felt outraged by those dreadful slanders, and then, as I tell you, I'm sure she has been actuated by some quixotic feeling, where her husband was concerned."

In a little over a week from that evening, I was in San Francisco. Besides having learned, through professional friends, a good deal that was detrimental to the character of Mr. Strong, one of those apparent accidents whereby fate so often elects to clear up mysteries had furnished me with a hold on Nick Purvis, the hotel waiter, which brought about the most satisfactory result.

I was able to convince Mr. Strong that, unless my letter were found, he was likely to suffer a severe penalty; but, if it did reach me, I should be content to think that some error in the post-office had caused its delay.

The letter made everything clear, and proved Norris right in his supposition. Adelaide Lafont had married Fielding rather because he loved her, and had been kind to her when her mother's sudden death left her alone in the world, than from real love on her part. Only a few months after her marriage, a relative died and bequeathed her several hundred thousand dollars. Fielding had speculated with his own money and that of his half-brother and sisters. He met with great losses, and, before he could settle matters, he was stricken down by illness. He told the whole truth to his wife, whose only thought was to save his memory from any stain. At the time of their marriage, he had made a will, leaving her everything he possessed, and this was the testament presented for probate—though in reality there was no fortune left. Adelaide meant, out of her own fortune, to pay her husband's debts and the sum due his half-brother and sisters, allowing it to appear that the means had been supplied by his estate.

The original thirty thousand dollars had not increased nearly to the extent which young Clevis thought. The truth was, the lawyer Strong wanted to make Mrs. Fielding trouble, and employed every artifice to urge his client on. Even after the production of my letter from Edgar Fielding convinced my cousin that he had no case, there still remained work for me—the clearing-up of the scandals in regard to the young widow. I discovered that Mr. Strong had originated the report sent to Howard Clevis at the time of Fielding's marriage. The lawyer had himself been wildly in love with Adelaide Lafont, who had always distrusted and detested him. Her maiden name was the same as that of a woman in Sacramento

on whom rested a suspicion of having benefited by a fraudulent will, and Strong took advantage of this circumstance, first to prejudice Fielding's relatives, and later, when he became Howard Clevis's counsel, to build up a plot which, though it could not have succeeded, might at least have entailed odious publicity and terrible trouble on his proposed victim.

The truth was brought to light, and Mr. Strong disappeared just in season to escape arrest.

Altogether, I was detained a number of weeks in California; and, when I returned to New York, I found Fred Norris and his wife stopping in town, and Mrs. Fielding with them.

During the next eighteen months, we saw a great deal of each other, and time only more thoroughly convinced me of a truth which had dawned on my mind soon after my second meeting with Adelaide Fielding—I loved her with all my heart and soul.

As a blunder caused our first meeting, so a lucky accident brought about the dénouement. I had managed to keep my secret, as I believed, although it had often been hard work. I feared to put my chances to the test—because, when occasionally I was ready to encourage hope for a little, something was sure to happen to fling me into the blackest depths of discouragement. During the autumn, an old admirer of Mrs. Fielding's appeared, and I was forced to add a frantic jealousy to my other woes. At last I could endure the torture no longer: I determined to leave the field clear to my rival; his ultimate success seemed certain, and I would not stand by to witness it. Professional business required that some member of our firm should make a journey to Jamaica. I decided to go myself, and called one evening to inform Norris and his wife of my intention.

Nettie was sitting alone in her beloved twilight, and I told her abruptly enough of my intention. She was profuse in her regrets, and teased me until at last, from sheer desperation, I gave her the true reason for my departure.

"I love Adelaide Fielding!" I exclaimed.

"That's no news to me," Nettie replied, calmly; "and I doubt if it is to her. You can ask, for here she comes, and must have heard your confession."

Away ran the little woman, with a gay laugh: I looked round—Mrs. Fielding was standing in the doorway. I hurried toward her: she stood quite still, with her face partly averted.

My first impulse was to rush after Mrs. Norris. It sounds a very cowardly admission on the part of a man of five-and-thirty—but I may as well own the truth. Indeed, if I am to make a full confession, I must add that I absolutely did take a hasty step toward the room into which that wicked Nettie had disappeared. Fortunately, the sound of the door closing behind her restored my senses sufficiently so that I realized what an undignified, not to say idiotic, appearance I must present.

I stopped and faced Mrs. Fielding, with an effort at composure which was born of sheer desperation.

"You heard what I said—I know you heard," was my brilliant opening speech.

Then I stopped, half choked, while all the blood in my veins seemed turning to ice. I knew that I should hear my sentence of doom pronounced; I felt that I would rather be treated with actual contempt than receive pity: however, speak I must—there was no help for it.

"Mr. Clevis—" she began, in a low tone. But I could not listen.

"It is the truth!" I went on, madly. "I didn't mean you to find it out! Of course, I never had much hope. And since—since— Oh, I wish you every happiness! Don't be angry! I am going away; I shan't come back till it's all settled—all settled."

"How can it be, if you go away?" she asked, softly.

Between plots, misconceptions, and mistakes, our acquaintance began inauspiciously enough; but I found my happiness IN SPITE OF ALL.

MIZPAH.

BY L. O.

"MIZPAH!" I cry; "O God, keep watch between us,
As we wander, homesick, many miles apart;
Keep watch between his life and mine, O Father;
Keep fresh the dear old love within our hearts."
We little dreamed, when last we met and parted
Within the twilight shadows, hand in hand,
So many weary years would roll away
Before we walked again the dear old sands.

"Mizpah!" Ah, once there was no need
To offer cry like this at heaven's gate—
For then we walked life's pathway side by side;
But now this dreary, dreary, endless wait.

"Mizpah! Keep watch between us, Father dear,
And guide him safe again to home and me:
Help us be patient in this waiting-time,
And keep him, God, on land and treach'rous sea."

One faithful heart awaits his coming home—
When, side by side again, life's path we'll tread,
And all the grief and sorrow of to-day
Will lie, all silent, with the buried dead.
"Mizpah!" Our faith grows brighter now,
E'en though the tears we shed blot out the way:
But surely He Who led us through the night
Will guide us safely to the dawning day.

THE COST.

BY ELLA HIGGINSON.

I set my will upon one great desire—
I worked for it and lived for it alone;
All things that barr'd my way were overthrown,
That I might mount the ladder higher and higher
That led to it. Through disappointment's fire
I came undaunted, with a heart of stone,
And soul from which all tenderness had flown;

And never once in all those years did tire
Or falter till the prize was in my hand—
Then I looked backward on those dead days, and
I saw the ladder, built of heart on heart
Which I had broken climbing. All the art
Of ages, I knew then, could not atone
For one of those hearts used as stepping-stone.